Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF
INFORMATION

RECEIVED
JAN 1
U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Thursday, January 26, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Questions and Answers." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

- - - - - - -

For a whole week I've been looking for an opportunity to answer the questions that have been coming in. Here's a free morning at last. But my pile of questions has grown so high in the meantime that I'm not sure whether I can work them all in. I'll make a try. We'll dedicate all of the time today to your questions and the answers from the specialists.

The first two questions that I have here are about curtains. One lady, who has been furnishing a playroom for her youngsters, wants to know what materials to use for curtains.

Well, from a practical standpoint in these thrifty times you want inexpensive curtains for your nursery. Then, you want curtains that will launder easily, will keep their color, will let in plenty of light and air and will be out of reach of small hands. So choose simple material and make the curtains simply. Ornate valances, fancy frills and flounces to catch dust, long drapes to the floor, fancy-work or heavy appliqué are less attractive than simple hangings. Short curtains that come just to the window sill or apron are best and are out of danger of being pulled down by small hands.

Cotton fabrics make the best curtains for the children's room. They are inexpensive and easily washed. You have the choice of either thin or heavier cotton material, depending on the kind of curtains you want. The heavier cotton fabrics make excellent draw curtains. Draw curtains may take the place of both shades and curtains, because you can pull them completely across the window when you want to shut off the light. Glass curtains are generally unnecessary in the playroom. They keep out some of the sun and get in the childs way when he wants to look out the window. But some playrooms - one on a city street, for example--may need glass curtains. Otherwise a plain simple drapery which hangs straight down at either side of the window is the best style.

Now about the fabrics. Good choices are: Cotton casement cloth, especially good for draw curtains; filet nets--for glass curtains; glazed chintz for draperies because it sheds dust; cotton prints; ginghams; voiles and even good-quality cheesecloth dyed to harmonize with the color scheme of the room. By the way, here's one point about curtains that may appeal to you during this dark season of year. Shades of yellow and gold in curtains often suggest sunshine at the window even on a gloomy winter day.

Here's the second letter about curtains: "Dear Aunt Sammy: Some yellow silk curtains which I have had hanging for several years went out to be washed recently and came back in strips and ribbons. Can you tell me what makes curtain fabrics rot this way?"

Both light and dust are enemies of curtains. Light often causes those holes which appear in curtains and drapes during laundering. The curtain fabric exposed to light and sun gradually burns and breaks down. Then the curtains become so tender that they fall apart when they are washed. Comparative tests show that cotton resists light better than wool, rayon or silk. Silk is the least resistant of all fabrics, particularly the gummed and weighted silk. Rayon or silk curtains, which have been attacked by light, are most easily torn when wet because these fibres become especially tender in water.

To determine whether a curtain has been harmed by light, compare the upper and lower parts. Usually the upper section, which has been protected from light by the window shade, is far stronger than the lower section.

Dust can harm curtain fabrics just as it can harm any other fabric. Sometimes the dust particles are actually sharp and cut into the fibres. To save your curtains, to make them last, wash or clean them frequently. Moisture and smoke also affect curtains. So does hard wear. Have you ever noticed that if you let your curtains blow in and out of the windows or rub against the screen over a period of time, you'll find that they are wearing out, fast?

So much for curtains. Now a question about candy. Ever since Christmas--and before--questions have been coming in about candy-making. Several have asked about tests and temperatures for homemade candies. Before I say anything about making, I'd like to remind you of a few facts about candy itself. Candy is a fuel or energy food, so count it as part of the day's food, not as an extra. The time to eat candy is after meals or with dessert. Eating candy between meals or in large amounts is unwholesome, whether you are five or fifty. Candy made from dried fruit, simple, homemade candy or plain hard candies are preferable to rich soft confections.

Now about tests and temperatures to tell when the candy is done.

The specialists say that sugar changes its form at different temperatures. And these changes cause a fundamental difference in candies. This is why, for success in candy making, you need to know the exact temperature that will produce a certain result and how to determine this temperature. If you want to be sure of results, a candy thermometer is the thing to depend on. Guesswork is often extravagant. A friend told me the other day that the sugar she had spoiled by guessing when her candy was done would have paid for a thermometer. Of course, before thermometers were invented, cooks used certain little candy tests of their own. Many home candy-makers still use them. Such tests are not accurate, but they are next best to cooking by thermometer.

One of these household tests is made by dropping a little of the mixture in ice water and then seeing how hard a ball it forms. The stages that candy reaches as it is heated are often called: first,"soft ball," then "firm ball" then "hard ball," then "crack." For soft cream candy like fondant or fudge, you heat the mixture to the "soft ball" stage. That is when it forms a soft ball in cold water. For peanut brittle, taffy and divinity, you heat the mixture to the "hard ball" stage. Another home test is the "thread" test. If you drop your sugar mixture from a fork, it will form a short thread or "web" between the times when it reaches the "soft ball" stage. At the"hard ball" stage it will form a long thread. The soft ball stage is 238 to 240 degrees on your candy thermometer. The hard ball stage is 250 degrees. If you use a thermometer, you simply cook the mixture to a certain temperature. No other test is necessary.

Friday: "Sunday Night Supper."